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Summary

Specificity in Personality Measurement

Personality tests are frequently used in selection situations. It is therefore important for researchers to explore and examine factors that influence the predictive validity of personality tests. This dissertation focused on one characteristic that may positively influence the predictive validity of personality, namely *specificity in personality measurement*. Three kinds of specificity were examined: (1) trait specificity, i.e., using narrow rather than broad personality traits (e.g., Ashton, 1998); (2) contextual specificity, i.e., the specificity of the situational context to which respondents refer when filling out a personality inventory, such as the home, school, or work context (e.g., Lievens, De Corte, & Schollaert, 2008) and (3) referent specificity, which refers to the specificity of the comparison other in self-reported personality, such as an in-group or out-group comparison other (e.g., Heine, Lehman, Peng, & Greenholtz, 2002). Several empirical studies were conducted to investigate the nature of trait, contextual, and referent specificity, as well as their relative effects on the prediction of relevant academic and work outcomes. As the past decades have seen significant increases in the numbers of ethnic minorities in Western societies, this dissertation also focused on another important issue in personality assessment, namely *ethnicity* effects. Specificity in personality measurements may shed new light on this. For instance, in the case of trait specificity, previous studies have shown that the summation of facet scores to obtain a broad trait wrongly masked substantial ethnic group variation in facet scores (e.g., Van Iddekinge, Taylor, & Eidson, 2005).

First, we will provide a summary of the methodology and main findings of the empirical studies, then we will proceed to discuss our results' theoretical implications and contribution to previous research, followed by some limitations, suggestions for future research, and practical implications.

Summary of main findings

The following outlines the methodology and main findings of six empirical studies in order to answer eight research questions presented in the introduction. These eight research questions respectively relate to (1) personality in academic contexts; (2) ethnic majority and minority students; (3) personality in work contexts; (4) Dutch majority and Turkish-Dutch minority employees; (5) trait specificity in an academic and work context; (6) ethnic score differences in an educational and organizational setting; (7) contextual specificity in a work context and (8) referent specificity among Turkish-Dutch minority members.

1. Personality in academic contexts

Chapter 2 focused on the first research question, namely whether Conscientiousness and Honesty-Humility are positively related to academic performance and/or negatively related to counterproductive academic behavior (CAB). To this purpose, two separate empirical studies, using different personality questionnaires and different samples, were presented.

In the first study, undergraduate students ($N = 226$) from a large School for Higher Education in The Netherlands filled out the HEXACO Personality Inventory Revised (HEXACO-PI-R; Ashton & Lee, 2007; De Vries, Ashton, & Lee, 2009; Lee & Ashton, 2006, 2008) and the Inventory of Counterproductive Behavior (ICB; Hakstian, Farrell, & Tweed, 2002), which measures the display of counterproductive behaviors at school. At the end of the academic year the participants' grade point average (GPA) was acquired from the School's official records.

The data for the second study were partly obtained as part of a student mentoring and study skills enhancement project at the same School for Higher Education. During this project, students ($N = 1262$) completed the Multicultural Personality Test - Big Six (MPT-BS; NOA, 2009). Again, after one-year participants' GPA was acquired from official records. Participants in this second study were additionally asked to voluntarily fill out the ICB. All in all, 183 students filled out the MPT-BS as well as the ICB.

Both studies indicate that Conscientiousness and Honesty-Humility/Integrity¹ are positively related to academic performance and negatively related to CAB. These results to our knowledge provide the first empirical evidence that Honesty-Humility/Integrity is, after Conscientiousness, the second-best predictor of academic performance. Specifically, our findings show that the Conscientiousness and Honesty-Humility/Integrity facets Diligence, Achievement Motivation, Need for Rules and Certainty, Greed Avoidance, and Modesty display the strongest relations to academic performance. This means that students who work hard, set goals, have a preference for structure, are modest, and are uninterested in having a high social status, are more successful academically.

Furthermore, while little is known yet about personality factors relevant for the prediction of CABs (such as showing up late for class and plagiarism on assignments), our results show that the Conscientiousness and Honesty-Humility/Integrity facets Fairness, Need for Rules and Certainty, and Diligence were most strongly and negatively related to CAB. These findings seem to suggest that students who take advantage of other people, do not want to live according to certain rules, have little self-discipline and are not strongly motivated to achieve, show relatively *more* counterproductive behaviors at school than others.

¹ Since in the MPT-BS the sixth personality dimension is labeled Integrity (instead of Honesty-Humility), we will refer to it as both Honesty-Humility and Integrity.

2. Ethnic majority and minority students

Having shown in Chapter 2 that Conscientiousness and Integrity are positive predictors of academic performance, Chapter 3 investigated whether these relations between personality and academic performance are similar across ethnic majority and minority students (Research question 2). Part of the data used in Chapter 2 was used for the study described in Chapter 3. First, a separate ethnic majority ($N = 1052$) and ethnic minority sample ($N = 184$) was conducted. The latter consisted of non-Western ethnic minorities with a Turkish, Moroccan, Surinamese, or Antillean background, thus including the four largest ethnic minority groups currently residing in The Netherlands. Second, participants with another ethnic background, such as an Indonesian background, were excluded because there were only few of them.

In line with previous studies (e.g., Roth & Bobko, 2000), the results show that ethnic background was significantly related to GPA, i.e., ethnic minorities showed on average lower levels of academic performance than majority participants. In addition, the findings also reveal that among ethnic minorities Conscientiousness displays a relatively limited predictive validity for academic performance in comparison to ethnic majority students. Vice versa, Integrity, in particular its facet Sincerity, was found to be a stronger predictor of academic performance for ethnic minorities than for ethnic majorities.

3. Personality in work contexts

Research question 3 focused on the importance of personality factors in a professional context. This question was subdivided into three separate questions. First, we investigated whether Conscientiousness and Honesty-Humility are positively related to job performance. The second question focused on whether Conscientiousness, Agreeableness, Extraversion, and Honesty-Humility are positively related to organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). The third question concerned whether Conscientiousness and Honesty-Humility are negatively related to counterproductive work behavior (CWB).

In Chapter 4, we presented two separate studies that sought to answer Research question 3, using different personality questionnaires and different samples. For the first study we employed a snowball technique in order to approach employees working in a broad variety of occupations and work sectors. Participants ($N = 238$) were asked to fill out a questionnaire consisting of the HEXACO-PI-R and questions measuring self-reported OCB and CWB. In order to measure the job performance of the employees, their supervisors were asked to complete several questions. In the second study ($N = 254$) we took a similar approach but chose a different personality questionnaire: the MPT-BS. For both studies, three experts categorized the range of occupations into six general types (see Holland, 1997, for these occupational types).

Both studies revealed that Conscientiousness is significantly and positively related to supervisor-rated job performance, which is in line with the findings of earlier research in this area (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Hurtz & Donovan, 2000; Salgado, 1997; Tett, Jackson,

& Rothstein, 1991). At the facet-level, the results show that the facets Diligence, Perfectionism, and Achievement Motivation are among the strongest predictors of job performance. This finding suggests that hard-working employees with attention for detail and a drive to deliver the best possible performance on average receive higher supervisor job performance ratings than less conscientious employees. One of the further aims of these two studies was to examine whether Honesty-Humility is related to job performance across different kinds of occupational groups. To date, no prior research of personality measures has looked into this issue. Contrary to our expectations, we found in both studies that Honesty-Humility/Integrity and its facets were not significantly related to job performance. Moreover, we did not find interaction effects between Honesty-Humility/Integrity and occupational type in relation to job performance.

In addition to job performance, the studies presented in Chapter 4 also examined the prediction of OCB. As expected, the results suggest that Conscientiousness, Agreeableness, and Extraversion are relevant indicators for the display of OCBs. Yet, we did not find the expected positive relation between Honesty-Humility/Integrity and OCB. However, instead of Honesty-Humility/Integrity, Openness to Experience showed a significant and positive relation with OCB. Specifically, hard-working, highly motivated employees who are confident in social situations, who have a preference for innovation, forgive others easily, like to help others out and remain calm, show relatively more OCBs.

With respect to the last work outcome to be predicted, we found that Conscientiousness and Honesty-Humility/Integrity displayed significant and negative correlations with CWB. According to the most predictive facets of Conscientiousness and Honesty-Humility/Integrity, among employees who live according to certain rules, adopt a structured style of work, inhibit their impulses and are honest towards others, CWBs are less likely to occur. Interestingly, with regard to some predictive facets of Openness to Experience and Extraversion, those workers who seek excitement, express themselves creatively, prefer to be in the spotlight, and are receptive to seemingly strange or radical ideas are generally *more* likely to show CWBs.

4. Dutch majority and Turkish-Dutch minority employees

Having shown in Chapter 4 that several personality traits are significant predictors of work outcomes, Chapter 5 focused on the question whether the relations between personality and work outcomes are similar among Dutch majority and Turkish-Dutch minority employees (Research question 4). For this purpose, we re-used the data on Dutch employees ($N = 211$) from the second study described in Chapter 4. To these data we added data from ethnic minority participants ($N = 81$), i.e., employees from a Turkish-Dutch minority background. Since most Turkish-Dutch employees were unwilling to cooperate as respondent if their supervisors were asked for job performance ratings, we decided not to collect supervisor-rated job performance in this case. Instead, we used only self-reported job performance. In this study, personality was found to predict job

performance, OCB, and CWB to the same degree among Dutch and Turkish-Dutch employees.

5. Trait specificity

Christiansen and Robie (2011) recently have emphasized the importance of studies focusing on narrow personality traits, noting that “since 2003, there have been more than 200 studies published in the *Journal of Applied Psychology* and *Personnel Psychology* that used the FFM, and only 10 (< 5%) have considered more narrow traits in any way; very few used scales that even provide scoring instructions at the facet level” (p. 183). One aim of this dissertation therefore was to examine whether the prediction of academic and work outcomes benefits from the use of narrow traits (Research question 5). Against the view of those scholars who argue that broad traits are better predictors of broad and complex criteria (e.g., Ones & Viswesvaran, 1996), the studies conducted and presented in Chapter 2 and 4 (as summarized above) and in Chapter 6 show that, even in the case of predicting broad criteria such as work and academic performance or complex criteria such as OCB, CAB and CWB, narrow traits were able to explain more variance than the broad traits.

6. Ethnic score differences

Research question 6 focused on the relation between ethnic background and score differences on broad versus narrow personality traits and was stated as follows: Do narrow facet traits show larger ethnic score differences than the respective broad factor traits? This question was answered in both Chapters 3 and 5.

The study presented in Chapter 3 (as described above) focused at least in part on ethnic score differences between majority and minority *students*. The results suggest that the use of broad personality traits, in this case Conscientiousness and Integrity, may partially conceal ethnic score differences, since the narrow traits showed larger ethnic score differences. In line with De Meijer, Born, Terlouw, and Van der Molen (2006), we found that ethnic minorities scored significantly higher on Conscientiousness than did ethnic majorities. It was especially on the Conscientiousness facets Orderliness and Need for Rules and Certainty that ethnic minorities scored higher than ethnic majorities; the differences between means on these facets were larger than on the Conscientiousness factor scale. An interesting further finding is that the facets of Integrity not only showed larger ethnic score differences than did the broad Integrity factor, but also opposing ethnic score differences: Ethnic minorities scored significantly higher on Honesty and Sincerity, but significantly lower on Greed Avoidance than ethnic majorities.

The study presented in Chapter 5 (as described above) focused in part on ethnic score differences between Dutch majority and Turkish-Dutch minority *employees*. With respect to ethnic score differences on the broad factors, Turkish-Dutch minority employees scored significantly higher on Conscientiousness than did ethnic majority employees. Looking at the narrow facet scales, we found that the Turkish-Dutch minority

scored significantly higher than the Dutch majority on the facets Need for Rules and Certainty (C), Orderliness (C), Attentiveness (A), Eagerness to Learn (O), and Honesty (I).² Finally, compared to the Dutch majority, the Turkish-Dutch minority scored significantly lower on the facets Emotional Control (ES), Confidence in Others (A), Need for Excitement (O), and Greed Avoidance (I). These results indicate that the broad factors seem to mask ethnic score differences. Particularly in the case of Agreeableness, Openness, and Integrity, the Turkish-Dutch minority scored significantly lower than the majority on one facet, and significantly higher on another facet, while both facets belong to the same broad factor. The corresponding factors did not display ethnic score differences, which suggest that combining facets to obtain a broad trait may have the effect of wrongly masking ethnic score differences on several facets.

7. Contextual specificity

The seventh research question concerns whether work-specific personality scales are more strongly related to job performance, OCB, and CWB than are non-contextualized and (conceptually irrelevant) home-specific personality scales. In addition, we examined whether home-specific personality scales show a weaker relationship with job performance, OCB, and CWB than the corresponding non-contextualized personality scales.

Chapter 6 was devoted to answering these questions through one empirical study. We used a snowball procedure to approach employees working at a broad range of occupations and work sectors. A within-subject design was employed in such a way that all participants ($N = 289$) completed non-contextualized items as well as work-specific and home-specific items. With respect to the non-contextualized items, participants received the standard instructions and were asked to indicate the extent to which a number of statements applied to them. For the work-specific and home-specific personality scales, we added either the tag “at work” or the tag “at home” to all items. One week later, participants filled out a second questionnaire, this time measuring three important work criteria: self-reported job performance, OCB, and CWB.

The findings strongly suggest that adding a relevant context to personality items leads to a higher validity of work outcomes. Specifically, we found that the work-specific Conscientiousness and Integrity scales together have a stronger relation with work outcomes than the non-contextualized and (conceptually irrelevant) home-specific scales of Conscientiousness and Integrity. Finally, our study also indicates that the combined home-specific scales of Conscientiousness and Integrity display a weaker relation with work criteria than the corresponding non-contextualized personality scales.

² C = facet of Conscientiousness; A = facet of Agreeableness; O = facet of Openness; I = facet of Integrity; and ES = facet of Emotional Stability

8. Referent specificity

The final empirical study focuses on the question to what extent members of an ethnic minority group are influenced by perceptions of comparison others when filling out a personality test (Research question 8). The study described in Chapter 7 examined the following issues: (1) whether personality differences between Turkish-Dutch minorities and Dutch majorities were masked when Turkish-Dutch compared themselves with people from their own ethnic group (in-group comparison), and (2) whether personality differences between Turkish-Dutch minorities and Dutch majorities could be found when Turkish-Dutch minorities compared themselves with a Dutch majority out-group. In the latter case, we expected that Turkish-Dutch minorities would show lower scores on Conscientiousness, Openness, and Honesty-Humility, and higher scores on Neuroticism, than Dutch majority members. This expectation was based on findings of Terracciano et al. (2005) on perceived national character (PNC). From these results, it may be deduced that there are PNC-differences on Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, Openness to Experience, and Honesty-Humility between The Netherlands and Turkey.

In order to test our eighth and final research question, Turkish-Dutch minorities ($N = 95$) were first asked to complete a personality test with standard instructions (no reference-group). Then, one week later, they received the same personality questionnaire, but now with the specific instruction to compare themselves with people from the Dutch majority group (out-group comparison). Finally, again one week later, we asked the participants to complete the personality test with the instruction to compare themselves with people from their own Turkish-Dutch minority group (in-group comparison). The final sample that completed every version consisted of 34 Turkish-Dutch minority members. The Dutch majority participants ($N = 74$) filled out the personality test once only, with standard instructions (no reference-group).

Our results showed no score differences between the Dutch majority and the Turkish-Dutch minority in the no reference-group conditions. This finding is consistent with the idea that reference-group effects confound ethnic comparisons (Heine et al., 2002). We also found no score differences between Dutch majorities and Turkish-Dutch minorities when the latter compared themselves with people from their own Turkish-Dutch minority group. This indeed was what we had expected: When people compare themselves with similar others, in this case people from their own ethnic group (in-group comparison), true personality differences between ethnic groups may be masked. In contrast, when the Turkish-Dutch minorities reflected on their behavior in comparison to the Dutch majority group (out-group comparison), they tended to perceive themselves as less honest and humble than the Dutch majority. Finally, when the Turkish-Dutch used an out-group comparison other, they saw themselves as more emotional as well as less agreeable and less open for new experiences than when they used an in-group comparison other. The findings do suggest that Turkish-Dutch members are influenced by perceptions of comparison others when filling out a personality test.